Press Release: International Women's Day

Planet 50-50 by 2030: Step It Up for Gender Equality

KABUL, 8 March 2016 – The United Nations in Afghanistan celebrates today International Women's Day, which is being marked globally under the theme of "Planet 50-50 by 2030" to challenge entrenched patterns of discrimination and inequality and to celebrate the acts of courage and determination of women and girls around the world.

In Afghanistan, the last decade has seen significant progress in the promotion of gender equality, most notably in constitutional guarantees on non-discrimination, the enactment of the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law criminalizing harmful traditional practices, and, most recently, the adoption of the National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) committing to promote women in leadership and their meaningful participation in conflict-prevention, peace negotiations and post-conflict processes.

The UN also recognizes the increased representation of Afghan women in the workplace - including within Afghan Ministries, Parliament and civil society - and Afghan women's significant contribution to the economic and social development of the country.

Despite these important achievements, Afghan women continue to be confronted by enormous challenges that exclude them from political processes vital for peace and security. Additionally, the escalation in conflict continues to take a heavy toll on Afghan civilians, and Afghan women in particular, with a 37 per cent increase in women casualties in 2015 compared to 2014.

The continued prevalence of violence against women and harmful practices stemming from pervasive discrimination continues to be of serious concern. In 2015, the UN observed increased incidents of targeting, threats and intimidation of women in public life across the country, particularly those outspoken activists promoting women's rights.

Moreover, women's representation in leadership roles, while advancing over years past, remains inadequate, often only symbolic and limited to the provincial capitals. Echoing the refrain of this year's Women's Day theme, the UN in Afghanistan calls for much more to be done to reverse inequality and translate commitment into real opportunities for Afghan women.

In particular, the UN in Afghanistan calls upon the government to strengthen the implementation of national gender commitments in compliance with Afghanistan's international obligations - including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - and the recently adopted global Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals.

"Sustaining the gains made and promoting women's rights are a must for Afghanistan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and, more specifically, to make the goal of 50-50 by 2030 a reality," said Elzira Sagynbaeva, UN Women's Afghanistan Country Representative.

The deteriorating security situation and a corresponding fragile post-transition Afghanistan, said Ms. Sagynbaeva, have led to a growing concern about the future of Afghan women and how to ensure that the hard-won struggles of the women of Afghanistan are not compromised or lost.

“Substantial participation of women in the forthcoming parliamentary and district elections is critical to the credibility and inclusiveness of the process,” she said, stressing that the Afghan Government must ensure women’s rights and their meaningful participation in any peace talks.

“Women must be able to participate actively in all political, social and development initiatives across the country, including in any peace processes,” said Nicholas Haysom, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan.

The UN envoy, who is also head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).said the world body remains committed to advancing women’s meaningful participation in building sustainable peace and security.

Mr. Haysom added that Afghan men and boys have an important role to play in helping to empower women and achieve gender equality in the home, the community and the workplace.

“The United Nations celebrates the achievements made by Afghan women and calls for additional action to address the gaps that still remain in making gender equality a reality for Afghan women and girls,” he said.

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